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# Epidemics and Wild Chimpanzee Study Groups

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*Ed. note: As noted in several articles in this issue both chimpanzees and bonobos in the wild are threatened by habitat destruction, hunting and the pet trade. However, the possibility of infection by dangerous pathogens also poses a serious threat to chimpanzee welfare. In particular, those groups well-habituated for scientific research or tourism face the most serious risk of infectious disease transmission by humans.*

An outbreak of a paralytic disease at Gombe, probably poliomyelitis, was reported to have presumably killed six chimps and crippled six others in 1966 (for the details, see Dr. Jane Goodall's book *In the Shadow of Man*). Dr. Goodall suspected that the chimps had been afflicted through an epidemic in the local human population. According to Dr. Craig Stanford, the second tragedy occurred in the wet season of 1987 when a pneumonia epidemic broke out. Up to ten chimps in Kasakela community died including two of the prime adult males, Satan and Jomeo. At the same time two adult males of the neighboring Mitumba community were found dead in the early stages of the habituation project there. Although it was not certain where the pathogens came from, it is very likely that the pneumonia epidemic affected the chimpanzee population across a wide area.

We have also heard disturbing news from Tai forest, Côte d'Ivoire that a number of chimps were infected with the Ebola virus, notorious for its high fatality rate. The following article about these events was contributed by Dr. Christophe Boesch and Dr. Hedwige Boesch-Achermann who have led the chimpanzee research project since 1979.

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